

COMMENTS AT USDA FARM BILL LISTENING FORUM by Robert Foster in  
Burlington Vermont

As a fourth generation dairy farmer, composter , energy producer and Agri-Mark cooperative director, I want to thank all those who made it possible for the opportunity to share my concerns and suggestions.

My first concern involves the financial returns from farming. Our fifth generation farm is trying to figure out how to transition the farm business from the fourth generation to the fifth generation while at the same time trying to buy out the third generation. Land values are increasing rapidly with tremendous pressure to convert it to non-agricultural uses. Efforts to further develop and sustain the profitability of farms are needed.

Profitability is the best way to keep open space and farmers on the land as well as meeting the conservation and environmental goals that go with good stewardship and sustainable communities. Re authorization of the MILC program, which I applaud Secretary Johanns for supporting, provides a safety net for dairy producers in this volatile milk market as well as some assurance to my generation and the next that the transition will be successful.

Our farm over the years has worked to diversify its operation and to use our resources in a sustainable manner. Regulations are becoming an increasing burden. We applaud efforts to focus resources on conservation such as CSP and assistance such as EQUIP in meeting the requirements by society that benefit society as a whole. I do feel that the administration and payments to farmers should stay with FSA and NRCS should provide the technical assistance and design.

I am very concerned about efforts to apply CERCLA and EPRA regulations on the live stock industry without society funding the studies to determine if they in fact they do apply. Then if they do, what can be done to mitigate the concerns.

On a more positive note, I am excited about the tremendous potential for agriculture and agricultural land to produce energy. I would encourage USDA to focus resources in this area which could help revitalize Rural America as well as make America less vulnerable to the whims of others.

Programs should not pit large farms verse small or organic verses conventional. Agricultural production needs to be spread across the country from a bio-security point of view alone. Conservation and building healthy soils are essential to the long term viability of our land.

As banks continue to consolidate and become less personal, access to capital will become even more critical. Farm businesses, as well as other businesses owned and operated by farmers, need marketing assistance funds and appropriate access to capital to grow and continue to return profits back to farmers.

Thank you for this opportunity to express my thoughts and concerns.

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